

## The Mind of Christ

Sermon by Jan Wiersma

Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

Palm Sunday - March 28, 2021

Texts: Mark 14:53-64

### GOSPEL READING Mark 14:53-64

*On the night of the Passover, Jesus celebrates with his disciples: the Last Supper, the Lord's Supper. During the meal, he predicts that all of them will desert or deny him. Afterward, they go to the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus prays while his disciples sleep. Then the temple authorities, led by Judas the betrayer, come to arrest Jesus.*

They took him to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and

'you will see the Son of Man  
seated at the right hand of the Power,  
and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

If something happens once, it's chance. If it happens twice, it's coincidence. If it happens three times, it's either enemy fire - or a message from God. The third time wakes you up. You have to pay attention.

Today, on Palm Sunday, Sunday of the Passion, what is it that we need to pay attention to? What about this: **Jesus understood his sacrifice to be ... for all people, for all of creation, for all time. His sacrifice was not about a death for sin but about a life for love.**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Charleston, *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus*, "The Garden," page 140.

A Rule of Three pattern showed up for me this week, and offered some interesting parallels with the Jesus of our Bible and our faith.

First -- by chance -- in our anti-racism pilgrimage gathering last Sunday, someone recalled the execution of 38 Dakota Sioux at Mankato in 1862. This was the largest mass execution in US history. The reason was the war between the white settlers and the Indigenous people who had lived there for generations before. Their land, like the Palestine of Jesus' day, was occupied territory. Their hunting grounds had been stolen through deception. An agent who was supposed to deliver food promised to them mocked them, saying, "Let them eat grass." The Dakota attacked because they were literally starving. What they did, they did for the life of their people.

Second, by coincidence, I was reading the book *This Tender Land*, by William Kent Krueger. In it, a young orphaned Native man is searching for his origins. He becomes acquainted with the same history of hanging, a story he had never heard in his years at a nearby Indian boarding school. He learns that the trial of those 38 men was a sham, with trumped up evidence.<sup>2</sup> Sound familiar? Something like we read in the gospel today? Jesus was condemned when "many gave false testimony, and their testimony did not agree."

But the pattern emerged when I sat down with the words of my Native American teacher. Steve Charleston. Charleston calls Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane his "third vision quest." A vision quest, in Indigenous communities, is a time apart, undertaken for spiritual guidance *for the community*, not the individual. Charleston, too, invokes the story of the 38 men hanged at Mankato. Like Jesus, they understood that they were laying down their own lives for the life of their people. As they died, an audience of 4000 people cheered. Does that sound familiar, too?<sup>3</sup>

Here is where the pattern breaks down, though. The 38 were simultaneously hanged. They were hooded so they couldn't see one another, but they sang and called out their names. They were reassuring each other that not one of them was alone; they were united in body and in spirit. Jesus' agony in the garden was not simply that he was going to his death; but that he had to go alone. His disciples slept, and deserted or denied him. His dying would accomplish what no other death could do. He gave his life for the life of his people. His people are all people.

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We cannot know for sure what was in Jesus' mind when he rode a donkey into Jerusalem, when he celebrated the Passover with his disciples for the last time, when he washed their feet, when

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<sup>2</sup> William Kent Krueger, *This Tender Land*, pp. 331-333.

<sup>3</sup> Also read this article, published in 2012: [Largest Mass Execution in US History: 150 Years Ago Today](#)

he sweat blood in the garden, praying as they slept. But all the accounts - all four of the gospels - tell us pretty clearly that he knew he was headed toward death.

You know what's interesting, though? Not one of the gospels says that Jesus believed he would die because he had to pay some major debt to God for human sin, or because God was so seething with anger that only blood sacrifice would calm God down. That's something people came up with later. Jesus never knew the one he called Father as anything but love, and never wanted people to know God as anything but love, either. Atonement, that funny theological word, comes not from some Latin or Greek term for "appeasing God's wrath" but from English: at-one-ment, atonement. What Jesus desired so much for people he was willing to sacrifice his life for was this: that we would be one with God as he is one with God.

The *real reason* for Jesus' death and its end result was not that you and I would be forgiven for our sins and crimes and misdemeanors. Yes, forgiveness is part of it but it's only the beginning. It's like God says, "OK, you know you messed up, you know you're forgiven. NOW we can get to the really important part, repairing the past, building a future." Stopping with forgiveness is like quitting the marriage the day after the wedding. What about starting a family, making friends, building a home? For the church, what about coming together to extend forgiveness or a hand up to others, welcoming people to a place of joy and growth and healing? What about getting to know God as someone who really wants to get to know you?

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So what does it mean for you or me to have the mind of Christ? What is clear is that it doesn't mean I am a messiah. The book group is talking today about Pat Tillman, the pro football player who died in Afghanistan, mistakenly killed by his own comrades. His death was wrongly used to popularize a misguided, mismanaged war on terror. He was called a hero and he certainly inspired people, but he was no messiah. If I die for some good cause, I may be called a martyr, but even that's iffy. Mostly I'll just be dead. But, as I believe, I'll be following Jesus in the life to come. I expect that will involve loving and serving God in ways I can't imagine now.

But as long as we're on this side of life, we have a mandate - a commandment - from Jesus: Love one another as I have loved you. Not just in our little enclave of like-minded people where we're cozy, but out there in the world. Living in a way that puts people, peace, and a healthy planet ahead of personal glory. I'd put that on a rally sign. What would you put on yours? Take a minute to think of it if you haven't already done so while I read from Philippians about the mind of Christ:

Philippians 2:5-11 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born just like any human. And being found in

human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Jesus understood his sacrifice to be ... for all people, for all of creation, for all time. His sacrifice was not about a death for sin but about a life for love.**

### Prayers

God, you are our God, forgiving, healing, guiding us forward. Help us to remember that you are also the God of all people everywhere, that you are always near, the beating heart of heaven and the tender soul of earth.

So many people are wounded, bewildered, crushed: we hold in your loving light those so painfully affected by the shootings of the last weeks, or by tornados and bad weather in the south, those afflicted by the pandemic, those whose lives are threatened by hostile forces - as in Myanmar, by their own countrypeople. We do not forget the many children and others flocking to our southern border because of the violence, hunger, and despair they face in their own countries. Guide decision makers in our own government to just and compassionate choices.

May our concern extend beyond prayers to active assistance when and where we can, always remembering we are simply your partners in service to the human community and to the earth.

Besides those already named in our concerns, we remember MariLynn and Connie, for Judy Leal, that her upcoming appointments will be a positive step toward improved hearing for her; for Jane Burgstaler, together with her family and her friend Sara; Susie Olson in rehab, and all those whose life on earth is nearing completion, especially Glenna's mother and their family. May we all look to a future with you beyond this life, where healing is complete and where our prayers are only praise and joy in your presence eternally.

As Jesus, savior of the world, has taught us, we now pray: Our Father...